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THE 2013 LUMINA STUDY OF THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S OPINION ON HIGHER  
EDUCATION AND U.S. BUSINESS LEADERS POLL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

# **WHAT AMERICA NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT HIGHER EDUCATION REDESIGN**



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Lumina Foundation, an Indianapolis-based private foundation, is committed to enrolling and graduating more students from college — especially 21<sup>st</sup> century students: low-income students, students of color, first-generation students, and adult learners. Lumina's goal is to increase the percentage of Americans who hold high-quality degrees, certificates, and other credentials to 60 percent by 2025. Lumina pursues this goal in three ways: by identifying and supporting effective practices, through public policy advocacy, and by using communications and convening power to build public will for change.

More information is available at <http://www.luminafoundation.org>.

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## INTRODUCTION

Finding ways to help more Americans develop and connect their knowledge, skills, and talent with a good job may be the most important economic and human development challenge in this country. To contribute to the dialogue surrounding the importance of post-secondary education in preparing and connecting people with a good job, for the past three years, Lumina and Gallup have been gauging the American public's opinion on the most pressing issues facing higher education today, including cost, access, quality, and workforce readiness. This year, in addition to the annual public opinion poll conducted of the U.S. general population, a second survey was conducted of business leaders in the U.S. to understand their perceptions of post-secondary education and how higher educational institutions are doing in preparing employees for the world of work. Together these studies can help inform what thought leaders and ALL Americans need to know about the value and opportunity that quality higher education affords.

Some questions addressed across both studies include:

- How important is having a post-secondary degree or credential?
- What is the level of quality of an online degree program compared with a traditional one?
- How likely are employers to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education institution over one who has the same degree from a traditional institution?
- What is more critical to those making hiring decisions—a candidate's education pedigree or the skill set they bring to the job?
- Should green cards be issued to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. higher education institution?

Some additional questions addressed in the American public opinion poll on higher education include:

- Is higher education affordable for everyone who needs it?
- How important is having a certificate or degree beyond high school?
- What is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an undergraduate student to accumulate over a four year period?

Some additional questions addressed in the business leader poll on higher education include:

- What is the extent to which higher education institutions collaborate with businesses?
- Should immigrants with low levels of education have more opportunities to gain skills and knowledge in this country than they currently do, or not?

Together, these studies shed light on what Americans most need to know about the importance, value and opportunity for post-secondary degree and credential attainment.

## SECTION 1: THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S OPINION ON HIGHER EDUCATION

### *Snapshot of Findings*

Americans are largely convinced that higher education is very important and that it will be even more critical in the future. However, most say higher education is not affordable and don't think that the information on financial assistance is very easy to find. Americans say the quality of the degree and the quality of the faculty are two very important factors when selecting a college. Americans also want more information on colleges and universities such as the percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job and the average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from a university. Americans mostly favor policies that provide expanded opportunity for immigrants to get higher education concerning foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. educational institution.

- Most Americans (77%) do not think that higher education is affordable for everyone who needs it.
- 22% of Americans say that \$40,000 or more is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an undergraduate student to accumulate over a four year period.
- Only 16% of Americans say that it is very easy to find information on financial assistance for a college education.
- Only 14% of Americans say that it is very easy to find the average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from a college or university.
- When selecting a college or university, (82%) of Americans say that financial assistance for education is very important.
- When considering quality, 75% of Americans say that the qualifications of the faculty are very important.
- When considering quality, 68% of Americans say that the percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job is very important.
- When selecting a college or university, 81% of Americans say that the quality of a college degree program is very important.
- More than half of Americans feel they would favor a policy that allowed a green card to be issued to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. educational institution.

### **COST AND AFFORDABILITY**

A disparity exists between Americans' view on the availability and affordability of higher education. President Obama addressed the issue of college access and affordability during this year's State of the Union address, urging college leaders to continually look for ways to decrease the high cost of tuition. Results from this study show two-thirds of Americans feel that education beyond high school is available to anyone who needs it, and males are significantly more likely than females to say education is available to anyone who needs it — 73% versus 62%.

<i>Do you think education beyond high school is available to anyone who needs it?</i>	
Yes	67%
No	32%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

In spite of a majority of Americans perceiving that education beyond high school is available, most Americans say cost makes higher education unaffordable. Two-thirds of Americans say education beyond high school is available to anyone who needs it, but similar to 2012 findings<sup>1</sup>, only about 1 in 4 Americans (23%) feel that higher education is *affordable* for everyone who needs it. The majority (77%) feel that higher education is not affordable.

<i>Do you think higher education is affordable for everyone who needs it?</i>	
Yes	23%
No	77%

## THE IMPORTANCE OF DEGREE ATTAINMENT

An overwhelming majority of Americans (94%) recognize the importance of having a certificate or degree beyond high school. Most (70%) Americans say having a post high school certificate or degree is very important, and just a small fraction (5%) say a certificate or degree beyond high school is not very or not at all important to a person's financial security. Females (76%) are more likely than males (63%) to say a certificate beyond high school is very important.

Someone with either a certificate or degree beyond high school (77%) is more likely to say a certificate or degree beyond high school is very important over someone who reports having some college experience (60%) or has a high school diploma or less education (66%).

<i>How important is having a certificate or degree beyond high school?</i>	
Very important	70%
Somewhat important	24%
Not very important	4%
Not at all important	1%

The majority of Americans (82%) feel that in the future it will be more important than it is now to have a post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential to get a good job. Just 16% say it will be less important than it is now and very few (1%) say the level of importance will not change in the future.

<i>In your opinion, in the future, will it be more important or less important than it is now to have a post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential to get a good job?</i>	
More important	82%
Less important	16%
As important as it is now	1%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

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<sup>1</sup> Lumina Poll on Higher Education.

[http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/Americas\\_Call\\_for\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Redesign.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/Americas_Call_for_Higher_Education_Redesign.pdf)

When Americans were asked to indicate their level of agreement with whether or not having a certificate, certification or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job, results again underscored the importance of higher education with almost three in four (73%) respondents agreeing with this statement. Females (48%) versus Males (40%) are also more likely to strongly agree that a certificate, certification or degree beyond high school is essential.

*Again, on a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about higher education and the workforce.*

	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
Having a certificate, certification, or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job.	5%	6%	16%	29%	44%

Most Americans say it is at least somewhat important to increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary degree or credential, and about half say it is very important to do so.

	<b>%1 Not at all important</b>	<b>%2 Not very important</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat important</b>	<b>%4 Very important</b>
In your opinion, how important is it to increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary degree or credential? Would you say it is very important, somewhat important, not very important or not at all important?	3%	7%	39%	51%



Respondents who indicate they have a post-secondary degree or credential were asked to reflect on five things that could help increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary education. Two-thirds of these Americans say they have encouraged their employer to provide training or education opportunities for employees. Over half of Americans, 61%, have contributed to an organization that awards college scholarships or grants, and about half say they contributed to a college savings account for a friend or relative, mentored a student who is currently enrolled in a program, and have given money back to their higher education institution.

*Have you ever done any of the following things that could help increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary degree or credential? How about....*

	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>
Contributed to a college savings account for a friend or relative.	54%	46%
Mentored a student currently enrolled in college or a post-secondary program.	52%	48%
Encouraged your employer to provide training/education opportunities for employees.	65%	34%
Given money back to your higher education institution to support future students.	52%	48%
Contributed to an organization that awards college scholarships or grants.	61%	39%

Respondents who indicated they had not completed a degree or credential program of any kind beyond high school were asked to reflect on five things they could do to help increase their opportunity to attain a post-secondary degree or credential. Over four in ten (43%) of these Americans have researched degree programs that would fit their needs, and a similar proportion (40%) have talked to a college advisor or recruiter. Fewer than one-third (29%) of respondents without a post-secondary degree say they have completed a (FAFSA) form or spoken with employer's human resources staff about tuition support and reimbursement.

*Have you ever done any of the following things that could help increase your opportunity to attain a post-secondary degree or credential? How about....*

	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>
Completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form	29%	70%
Talked to a college advisor or recruiter	40%	60%
Spoken with your employer's Human Resources staff about tuition support or reimbursement	24%	75%
Researched degree programs that would fit your needs	43%	55%
Researched degree programs that award credits for prior learning	31%	68%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE PREPAREDNESS

In spite of American's certainty in the importance of having a post-secondary degree or credential, they are less certain about how prepared college graduates are for workforce success. Fewer than half (43%) of Americans agree that college graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workplace, and just 14% strongly agree with this statement. Lower income Americans are more likely to (24%) strongly agree that college graduates are well prepared for success in the workforce when compared with higher income families (7%). Americans with a high school diploma or less education are also more likely to strongly agree (21%) with this statement than someone with a certificate or degree beyond high school (8%).

<i>On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.</i>					
	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
College graduates in this country are well-prepared for success in the workforce.	7%	11%	40%	29%	14%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Americans have more confidence in the opportunity for a bachelor's degree over either an associate degree or high school diploma to lead to a good job. A strong majority of Americans (75%) agree that having a bachelor's degree can lead to a good job, with 36% saying they strongly agree. Half of Americans agree that an associate degree leads to a good job and only (38%) agree that a having a high school diploma can lead to a good job. Americans with more education and more income have less confidence in the ability of a degree to lead to a good job.

Low income households, those earning less than \$45,000.00 a year, are most likely to strongly agree (51%) that a bachelor's degree can lead to a good job. Americans with a high school diploma or less education are more likely to strongly agree (47%) that a bachelor's degree can lead to a good job than are those who have a certificate or degree beyond high school (26%).

<i>On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.</i>					
	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
I am confident that having a high school diploma can lead to a good job.	18%	21%	23%	11%	27%
<i>An associate degree is a college degree which typically takes two years of full-time study to complete a traditional program. Using a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about associate degrees. You may use any number between 1 and 5.</i>					
	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
I am confident that having an associate degree can lead to a good job.	4%	13%	33%	31%	19%
<i>As you know a bachelor's degree is a college degree which typically takes four years of full time study to complete a traditional program. Using the same five-point scale, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statement about bachelor's degrees. I am confident that having a bachelor's degree can lead to a good job.</i>					
	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
I am confident that having a bachelor's degree can lead to a good job.	2%	4%	19%	39%	36%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

## INFORMATION ACCESS AND QUALITY

When asked a series of questions regarding access to information, a majority of Americans (67%) felt it was easy to find information on the percentage of students who graduate from the college or university. About as many, 61%, say it is somewhat or very easy to find information about the price of the college or university. However, fewer than half of Americans (42%) say it is somewhat or very easy to find information on the average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from the college or university. Nearly one in four, 22%, say it is very difficult to find average loan debt information. Likewise, few Americans, 43%, find it easy to find information on the percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job; 14% say it is very difficult to find this information.

<i>Please tell me if it is very easy, somewhat easy, somewhat difficult, or very difficult to find information about each of the following. How about...?</i>				
	<b>%1 Very difficult</b>	<b>%2 Somewhat difficult</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat easy</b>	<b>%4 Very easy</b>
Financial assistance for college education	13%	31%	40%	16%
The quality of college degree programs	8%	33%	42%	14%
The percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job	14%	42%	34%	9%
The percentage of students who graduate from the college or university	5%	26%	45%	22%
The percentage of students who pursue further education	6%	35%	44%	13%
The price of the college or university	16%	22%	31%	30%
The qualifications of the faculty	10%	37%	37%	15%
The average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from the college or university	22%	33%	28%	14%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

The general population perceives that the qualifications of the faculty trump other factors as an indicator of college quality. Nearly all (98%) of Americans say this is at least somewhat important to quality, and 75% say it is very important. The percentage of students who pursue a further education emerged as the least important quality factor with only 41% of Americans rating it very important. Females (78%) are somewhat more likely than males (71%) to say the qualifications of the faculty is very important.

*Please tell me if each of the following factors are very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to the overall QUALITY of a college or university. How about...?*

	<b>%1 Not at all important</b>	<b>%2 Not very important</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat important</b>	<b>%4 Very important</b>
The percentage of graduates who are able get a good job	1%	3%	27%	68%
The percentage of students who graduate from the college or university	1%	5%	34%	59%
The price of the college or university degree	2%	6%	24%	67%
The percentage of students who pursue further education	2%	10%	45%	41%
The qualifications of the faculty	1%	1%	23%	75%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Most Americans feel that financial assistance and the quality of college degree programs are very important factors in the college selection process with over 8 in 10 saying these are very important factors in selecting an institution. The percentage of students that pursue further education seemed to be the least important selection criterion with just 39% saying it is very important.

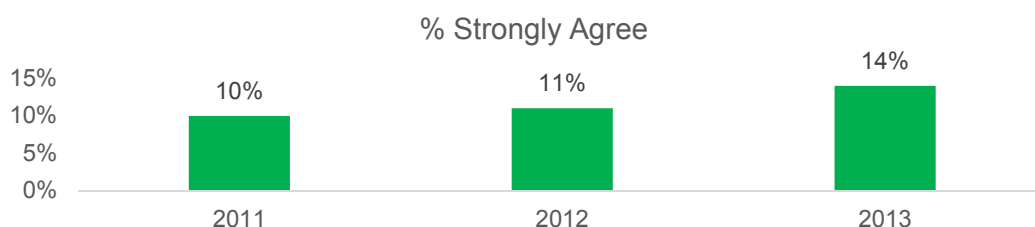
Females (87%) are more likely than males (77%) to say that financial assistance is a very important selection factor, and they are also more likely than males (86% of females versus 76% of males) to say the quality of degree programs is very important in selecting a college or university. Lower income families (93%) are significantly more likely than all other household income brackets to say financial assistance for college education is a very important selection criterion. Nearly nine in ten (87%) Americans with a high school diploma or less education say that financial assistance for college education is very important; a higher rate than Americans with a certificate or degree beyond high school (77%).

<i>Please tell me if each of the following factors are very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important for SELECTING a college or university. How about...?</i>				
	<b>%1 Not at all important</b>	<b>%2 Not very important</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat important</b>	<b>%4 Very important</b>
Financial assistance for college education	1%	2%	15%	82%
The quality of college degree programs	1%	2%	16%	81%
The percentage of graduates who are able to get a good job	1%	2%	24%	72%
The percentage of students who graduate from the college or university	1%	7%	35%	57%
The percentage of students who pursue further education	3%	16%	41%	39%
The price of the college or university	1%	3%	18%	78%
The qualifications of the faculty	1%	3%	23%	74%
The average amount of loan debt students have when they graduate from the college or university	2%	7%	26%	65%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Online education continues to lag behind traditional institutions in reputability and perception of quality. Gallup recently reported that “Americans tend to think [online education] provides less rigorous testing and grading, less qualified instructors, and has less credence with employers compared with traditional, classroom-based education.”<sup>2</sup> And similar to results from the 2011 and 2012 Gallup-Lumina polls on higher education<sup>3</sup>, few (14%) Americans strongly agree that online colleges and universities offer high quality education. Though there is some indication that the cool reception toward online degrees is thawing. (See Figure 1.) Over one-third (37%) of Americans agree or strongly agree that traditional colleges and universities offer high quality education. However, 41% of Americans from lower income households strongly agree with this, compared with just 26% of the highest income (\$100K+) households. Americans with a high school diploma or less are more likely to strongly agree (41%) that traditional colleges offer high quality education than are those (29%) who report having a certificate or degree beyond high school.

Figure 1



*On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements.*

	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
Online colleges and universities offer high quality education.	10%	17%	34%	23%	14%
Community colleges offer high quality education.	4%	9%	30%	33%	25%
Traditional colleges and universities offer high quality education.	1%	4%	19%	43%	34%
People in my community value post-secondary degrees and credentials or certificates.	4%	8%	27%	30%	32%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

<sup>2</sup> “In, U.S., Online Education Rated Best for Value and Options” Gallup Economy, Oct. 15, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/165425/online-education-rated-best-value-options.aspx> .

<sup>3</sup> 2011 Lumina Foundation Poll:

<http://www.gallup.com/poll/151844/Lumina-Foundation-Gallup-Poll-2011.aspx>

And the 2012 Lumina Foundation Poll:

[http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/Americas\\_Call\\_for\\_Higher\\_Education\\_Redesign.pdf](http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/Americas_Call_for_Higher_Education_Redesign.pdf)

Americans' diffidence about online education quality extends to the perception of employability of those with online credentials. Just 15% of Americans say employers are very likely to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider OVER a candidate with the same degree from a traditional high education institution. Four in ten say employers are not very or not at all likely to hire a candidate with an online degree over someone with a like degree from a traditional institution. Americans with a certificate or degree beyond high school were less likely than those who have a college degree or certificate to say an employer would give preference and hire an online degree candidate over a graduate from a traditional institution with just 8% saying employers are very likely to do so.

These findings align with other results. A recently published study of 656 human resources professionals found that "although nearly half of employers said online-only programs require more discipline, 56 percent said they still prefer applicants with traditional degrees from an average university over those with an online degree from a top university."<sup>4</sup>

*All else being equal, how likely are employers to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider OVER a candidate with the same degree from a traditional higher education institution - very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?*

Very likely	15%
Somewhat likely	44%
Not very likely	32%
Not at all likely	8%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

<sup>4</sup> Bidewell, A (2013, 9 20). "Employers, Students Remain Skeptical of Online Education," U.S. News & World Report, Sept. 20, 2013, <http://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/09/20/employers-students-remain-skeptical-of-online-education>



## STUDENT DEBT: HOW MUCH IS TOO MUCH

A majority of Americans (57%) say less than \$30,000 is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an undergraduate student to accumulate over a four year period. Two in ten (20%) respondents say \$20,000 to \$30,000 is a reasonable amount. Over two in ten Americans (22%) say less than \$10,000 in loan debt is a reasonable amount to accumulate over a four year period.

*Inside Higher Ed* recently reported that just 10% of college and university admissions directors say less than \$10,000 is a reasonable amount of loan debt to accumulate, though about three in four say less than \$30,000.00 is about right.

<sup>5</sup>These leaders were most likely to say \$20,000 to \$30,000 in loan debt is a reasonable amount to accumulate and this aligns with research on current student debt loads. In 2012, the average student loan debt reached \$29,400 according to The Institute for College Access & Success' Project on Student Debt.<sup>6</sup>

*In your opinion, what is a reasonable amount of loan debt for an undergraduate student to accumulate over a four year period?*

No amount of loan debt is reasonable.	6%
Under \$5,000	5%
\$5,000 to less than \$10,000	11%
\$10,000 to less than \$20,000	15%
\$20,000 to less than \$30,000	20%
\$30,000 to less than \$40,000	9%
\$40,000 to less than \$50,000	9%
\$50,000 or more	13%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

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<sup>5</sup> The 2013 Inside Higher Ed Survey of College and University Admissions Directors  
<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/surey/feeling-heat-2013-survey-college-and-university-admissions-directors>

<sup>6</sup> Ellis, B. (2013, 12, 5). "Average student loan debt: \$29,400,"CNNMoney, Dec. 5, 2013,  
<http://money.cnn.com/2013/12/04/pf/college/student-loan-debt/> .

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND HIRING: KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS ARE KING

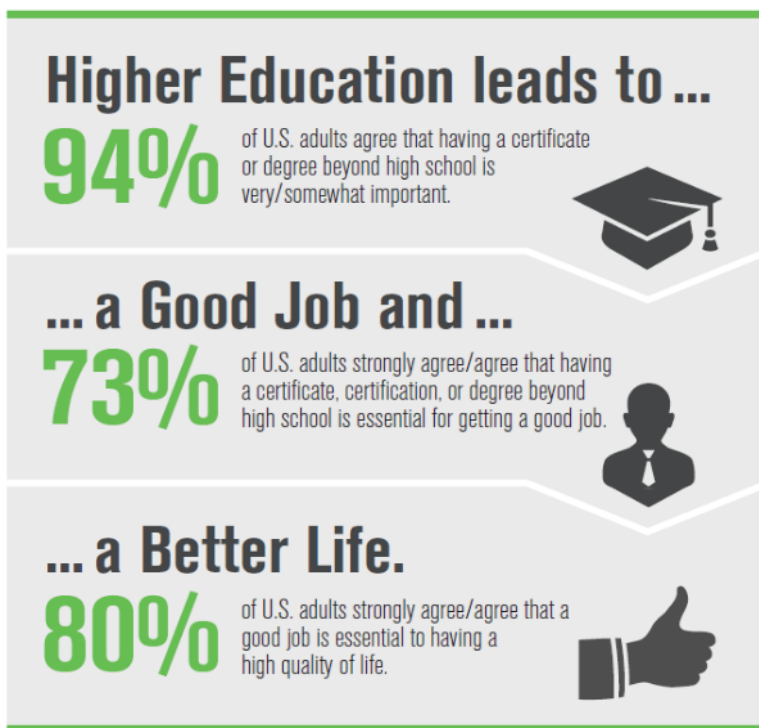
Americans were asked to reflect on four factors employers may consider in making hiring decisions. Americans (80%) were most likely to say that the amount of knowledge the candidate has in the field is a very important factor to managers when making hiring decisions for organizations. Following closely behind knowledge is the candidate's applied skills in the field with over three in four (76%) Americans saying it is a very important hiring factor. Another 22% say applied skills is a somewhat important factor. No respondents say this factor is not at all important in hiring decisions for managers.

By contrast, just 30% of respondents say that where the candidate received his or her college degree is a very important factor to managers when making hiring decisions, and about half (47%) say the candidate's major is very important to managers. More educated Americans, those who have a certificate or degree beyond high school, are more likely than less educated Americans to say that applied skills in the field are very important to hiring managers — 80% versus 71% say respectively say it is a very important factor in hiring.

*Please tell me if each of the following factors are very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to managers making hiring decisions for organizations. How about...?*

	<b>%1 Not at all important</b>	<b>%2 Not very important</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat important</b>	<b>%4 Very important</b>
The candidate's college or university major	2%	8%	43%	47%
Where the candidate received his or her college degree	4%	16%	50%	30%
The amount of knowledge the candidate has in the field	1%	2%	17%	80%
The candidate's applied skills in the field	0%	1%	22%	76%

### Higher Education and the American Dream



Over half of Americans say employers value knowledge and skills obtained through the process of earning a college degree. Just 2% strongly disagree. Again, over half of Americans (54%) strongly agree and 81% agree that a good job is essential to having a high quality of life. About three in four say a post-secondary degree or credential leads to a better quality of life. Two-thirds of Americans, 68% say increasing the degree attainment rate is necessary to build a strong economy.

*Again, on a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements about higher education and the workforce.*

	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
Employers' value knowledge and skills obtained through the process of earning a college degree.	2%	3%	20%	38%	37%
A good job is essential to having a high quality of life.	3%	4%	13%	27%	54%
A post-secondary degree or credential leads to a better quality of life.	3%	6%	17%	34%	40%
Increasing the degree attainment rate is necessary to build a strong economy.	5%	6%	22%	30%	38%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

## HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESSIBILITY

Most Americans (79%) believe that veterans should be given priority when applying to higher education institutions even if they apply with lower grades and test scores than other applicants. Less than half of Americans (41%) believe athletes should be given the same priority. Respondents from low income households, however, are more likely to say applicants from these groups should be admitted to higher education institutions even if they apply with lower grades and test scores; 86% say veterans should be admitted and 59% say athletes should be admitted. A smaller majority (73%) of those from high income households say veterans should be admitted even with lower grades and test scores than other applicants and 30% say the same of athletes.

Over half (58%) of Americans say minority students should be admitted even if they are admitted with lower grades and test scores and nearly two-thirds say the same about adult learners.

*In your opinion, should higher education institutions admit some applicants from the following groups even if they apply with lower grades and test scores than other applicants? How about....*

	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>
Athletes	41%	58%
Adult learners	66%	33%
Minority students	58%	41%
Veterans	79%	20%
Low-income students	68%	31%

Most Americans (89%) agree that higher education institutions needs to change to better serve the needs of today's students. Americans are evenly divided, however, on whether or not they see evidence that institutions are changing to better meet the needs of today's students. Americans with a high school diploma or less are less likely than more educated Americans to say they see evidence of change among higher education institutions with just 43% and 53% respectively saying they see evidence of change to meet student needs.

	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>
Do higher education institutions need to change to better serve the needs of today's students?	89%	10%
Do you see evidence that higher education institutions are changing to better meet the needs of today's students?	49%	48%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

More than half of Americans say they would favor a policy that called for issuing a green card to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. higher education institution. Respondents from lower income households are significantly more likely than those from high income households to favor an international student green card policy over higher income families—66% versus 45%.

	% Favor	% Oppose
Would you favor or oppose a policy that says a green card will be issued to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. higher education institution?	55%	42%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

One-third (34%) of Americans believe that family or kinship ties to U.S. Citizens should be the highest priority in making immigration policy decisions that impact those seeking to enter the U.S. Work skills follows closely as the next most important factor selected and education level is close behind with one in four respondents selecting it as the highest priority in making immigration policy decisions.

<i>What single factor should be the highest priority in making immigration policy decisions that impact those seeking to enter this country -- family or kinship ties to U.S. citizens, work skills, or education level of immigrants?</i>	
Family or kinship ties to U.S. citizens	34%
Work skills	29%
Education level	26%
All of the above (Not read)	4%
Another factor (Not read)	3%

Americans are divided on whether or not immigrants with low levels of education should have more opportunities to gain skills and knowledge in this country with half (50%) saying Yes and just fewer than half (47%) responding No. There was no meaningful difference between income and education groups on this issue.

	% Yes	% No
In your opinion, should immigrants with low levels of education have more opportunities to gain skills and knowledge in this country than they currently do, or not?	50%	47%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

A strong majority of Americans (88%) say they are not currently enrolled in a college degree or certificate program.

	<b>% Yes</b>	<b>% No</b>
Are you currently enrolled in a college degree or certificate program?	13%	88%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Source: Lumina Foundation/Gallup Poll 2013

This paper now turns to the opinions and perceptions of business leaders in America.

## SECTION 2: BUSINESS LEADERS' OPINIONS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

### *Snapshot of Findings*

An increased level of collaboration between business leaders and higher education institutions may well be one opportunity to help close the gap between what college graduates know and what businesses need. Most business leaders feel that higher education institutions are not currently graduating students with the skills and competencies their businesses need, and few say they are currently collaborating with any institution on any level.

On the whole, though, business leaders favor and would welcome an increased level of collaboration with higher education institutions.

The perceptions of the American public about what employers consider most important in making hiring decisions aligns largely with what business leaders prioritize. For business leaders, a person's skill set and knowledge are important factors in hiring a candidate, and they are open to increasing opportunities for immigrant workers who may possess those skill sets. However, the American public inflates the importance of college major and where the candidate earned their degree when compared with business leaders. One in ten business leaders say they need foreign born workers due to a shortage of American workers, and they largely favor increasing green card policies for foreign born international graduate students in the U.S. and increasing the opportunities for immigrants with low education levels. Some findings from the study of business leaders in America include the following:

- Seven in 10 leaders say they would consider hiring someone without a degree or credential over someone with one.
- Just 13% of business leaders say higher education institutions collaborate with business a great deal.
- Most leaders (88%) favor an increased level of collaboration with higher education institutions
- About one in ten business leaders strongly agree that higher education institutions in this country are graduating students with the skills and competencies their business needs.
- Just (14%) of executives say they are very likely to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education over a candidate with a traditional higher education.
- Business leaders were most likely to indicate the amount of knowledge a candidate has in the field is a very important factor to managers making hiring decisions for organizations.
- For business leaders, work skills top the list of factors that should drive immigration policy decisions.

### HIGHER EDUCATION AND BUSINESS COLLABORATION

A majority of business leaders (71%) say they would consider hiring someone without a post-secondary degree or credential over someone with one, and one in four say they would not. This perspective may be due to the prioritizing of skills and knowledge in hiring decisions and could indicate a need for higher education institutions to revisit degree and credential programs to ensure they are aligning with what businesses most need.

<i>All things being equal, including experience, ability and company fit, would you consider hiring someone without a post-secondary degree or credential over someone with a post-secondary degree?</i>	
Yes	71%
No	25%
Don't know/Refused	4%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Just 13% of business leaders say higher education institutions collaborate with businesses a great deal, though another 43% say they collaborate a fair amount. Just 5% of business leaders say higher education institutions do not collaborate with businesses at all.

<i>To what extent do you think higher education institutions collaborate with businesses - a great deal, a fair amount, not much, or not at all?</i>	
A great deal	13%
A fair amount	43%
Not much	36%
Not at all	5%
Don't know/Refused	3%

There is clearly room to increase the extent to which higher education institutions and businesses collaborate, at least according to executives. Nearly nine in ten business leaders (88%) say they generally favor an increased level of collaboration between the two and just 8% say they oppose such collaboration.

<i>Generally speaking, do you favor or oppose an increased level of collaboration between higher education institutions and businesses?</i>	
Favor	88%
Oppose	8%
Don't know/Refused	4%

Similarly, executives largely agree that businesses should do more to increase their current level of collaboration with higher education institutions. Nearly eight in ten (77%) say businesses should do more to increase collaboration and 20% say they should not do more.

<i>In your opinion, should businesses do more to increase their current level of collaboration with higher education institutions?</i>	
Yes	77%
No	20%
Don't know/Refused	3%



A majority of business leaders say they do not currently collaborate or partner with any higher education Institution on any initiative. Just 29% of business leaders say they do currently collaborate.

<i>Does your business currently collaborate or partner with any higher education institution on any initiative?</i>	
Yes	29%
No	71%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Just 11% of business leaders strongly agree that higher education institutions in this country are graduating students with the skills and competencies that their business needs, and 17% strongly disagree with this statement. However, just 16% strongly agree that jobs at their business require a post-secondary degree or credential to be successful; 38% strongly disagree with this statement. About one-third (37%) of business leaders polled agree or strongly agree that this country has the highest quality higher education system in the world and 14% strongly disagree with this statement. One-third (32%) are neutral on the question.

Most business leaders do not need to hire foreign born workers. About one in ten agree their business must hire foreign-born workers due to a shortage of American workers with the skills their business needs, and over half, 57%, strongly disagree with this statement.

<i>On a five-point scale, where 5 means strongly agree and 1 means strongly disagree, please indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements. You may use any number between 1 and 5.</i>					
	<b>%1 Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>%2</b>	<b>%3</b>	<b>%4</b>	<b>%5 Strongly Agree</b>
Higher education institutions in this country are graduating students with the skills and competencies that MY business needs.	17%	17%	34%	22%	11%
Most jobs at my business require a post-secondary degree or credential to be successful.	38%	16%	16%	14%	16%
This country has the highest quality higher education system in the world.	14%	18%	32%	18%	19%
Our business must hire foreign-born workers due to a shortage of American workers with the skills we need.	57%	16%	14%	7%	4%

Business leaders were asked to reflect on the level of education required to perform different kinds of jobs at their business. About as many leaders say most jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential as say few jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree. One-third of leaders say at least 75% of jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential and more, 42%, say less than 25% of jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential. Two in ten (21%) say no jobs require any kind of post-secondary degree, credential or certification and nearly as many (17%) say all jobs require some kind of credential.

*Think about the level of education that is required for the different kinds of jobs at your business as you respond to the following questions.*

*What percentage of jobs at your business require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential, such as a certification, an associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or a graduate degree? (Open end and code response.)*

No jobs require any kind of post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential	21%
Less than 10%	8%
10% to less than 25%	13%
25% to less than 50%	12%
50% to less than 75%	12%
75% to less than 100%	16%
100% or ALL of the jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential	17%
Don't know/Refused	1%

When asked to reflect on education requirements for jobs at their business about ten years from now, fewer business leaders (12%) say that no jobs will require post-secondary degree than say so now, and about the same proportion, 16%, say all jobs will require this level of education in the future.

*Now, thinking into the future, what percentage of jobs at your business would you say will require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential, such as a certification, associate degree, a bachelor's degree, or graduate degree about TEN YEARS from now? (Open end and code response.)*

No jobs will require any kind of post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential	12%
Less than 10%	8%
10% to less than 25%	10%
25% to less than 50%	13%
50% to less than 75%	20%
75% to less than 100%	19%
100% or ALL of the jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential	16%
Don't know/Refused	2%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Opportunities are growing for people to attain post-secondary education that could include a certification or credential other than a bachelor's or associate degree. About two in ten (18%) leaders say at least 75% of jobs at their business require some kind of post-secondary certification that is neither an associate nor a bachelor's degree. The U.S. Census Bureau reported in the fall of 2012 that "more than 50 million U.S. adults, or one in four, had obtained a professional certification, license or educational certificate apart from a postsecondary degree awarded by colleges and universities."<sup>7</sup>

<i>What percentage of jobs at your business require some kind of post-secondary certification - not an associate or bachelor's degree?</i>	
No jobs require any kind of post-secondary certification	30%
Less than 10%	7%
10% to less than 25%	18%
25% to less than 50%	10%
50% to less than 75%	17%
75% to less than 100%	9%
100% or ALL of the jobs require some kind of post-secondary certification	9%
Don't know/Refused	0%

Americans perceive that employers are disinclined to hire candidates with online degrees and credentials over those with traditional degrees, and this study of business leaders seems to confirm their perceptions. Business leaders are unsure about the fitness of candidates with degrees/credentials from online providers, at least as it compares with candidates with like degrees from traditional institutions. Just 13% of executives say, all else being equal, that employers generally are very likely to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider over a candidate with the same degree from a traditional higher education institution. There seems to be an opportunity, however, for this perception to soften since another 41% of business leaders say employers are somewhat likely to hire online degree candidates over those with traditional degrees. Fewer than half (44%) either say they are not very likely or are not at all likely to do so.

<i>As you know, online higher education providers offer most or all of their courses and programs online via the web. Thinking about these online higher education providers....</i>	
<i>All else being equal, how likely are employers to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider OVER a candidate with the same degree from a traditional higher education institution - very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?</i>	
Very likely	13%
Somewhat likely	41%
Not very likely	34%
Not at all likely	10%
Don't know/Refused	2%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

<sup>7</sup> "One-Quarter of Adults Hold Educational Credentials Other Than an Academic Degree, Census Bureau Reports," U.S. Census Bureau news release, Jan. 16, 2014, <http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/education/cb14-10.html>

Business leaders are again lukewarm about the notion of hiring online degree candidates over those with traditional degrees. Just 14% of leaders say their own business is very likely to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider over a candidate with the same degree from a traditional higher education institution. Just one-third more say they are somewhat likely to do so. Half of leaders say their business is not likely to hire someone with an online degree over someone with a traditional degree.

*All else being equal, how likely is YOUR business to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider OVER a candidate with the same degree from a traditional higher education institution - very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely.*

Very likely	14%
Somewhat likely	33%
Not very likely	33%
Not at all likely	17%

Executives were asked to reflect on the likelihood that an employee might leave their business as a result of earning a post-secondary degree or credential. About two-thirds of executives say employees are somewhat or very likely to leave their business to take a different job as a result of earning the degree. Just 7% say they are not at all likely.

*If an employee earns a post-secondary degree or credential while employed by your business, in general, how likely is it that they will leave your business to take a different job as a result of earning his or her degree - very likely, somewhat likely, not very likely, or not at all likely?*

Very likely	22%
Somewhat likely	46%
Not very likely	22%
Not at all likely	7%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Of four factors presented, business leaders were most likely to indicate that the amount of knowledge a candidate has in the field is a very important factor to managers making hiring decisions for organizations. Over 8 in ten (84%) say it is a very important factor. Nearly as many business leaders, 79% say the candidate's applied skills in the field is a very important factor. Just 9% say where the candidate received their college degree is a very important factor in hiring decisions for managers, though more, 28% say the candidate's college or university major is a very important factor. Another 42% say it is a somewhat important factor.

*Please tell me if each of the following factors are very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not at all important to managers making hiring decisions for organizations. How about...?*

	<b>%1 Not at all Important</b>	<b>%2 Not Very Important</b>	<b>%3 Somewhat Important</b>	<b>%4 Very Important</b>
The candidate's college or university major	8%	22%	42%	28%
Where the candidate received his or her college degree	14%	40%	37%	9%
The amount of knowledge the candidate has in the field	0%	2%	14%	84%
The candidate's applied skills in the field	2%	2%	16%	79%

More business leaders favored a policy that says a green card will be issued to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. higher education institution with 61% saying the favor such a policy. Just 36% oppose it.

*Would you favor or oppose a policy that says a green card will be issued to foreign-born international students who graduate from a U.S. higher education institution?*

Favor	61%
Oppose	36%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

While Americans chose family or kinship ties as the key factor in making immigration policy decision, for business leaders, work skills tops the list of factors that should drive these decisions. Of three options provided, family or kinship ties to U.S. citizens, work skills, or education level, 42% of leaders say work skills should be the highest priority in making immigration policy decisions. One in four (25%) say family or kinship ties and 22% say education level.

<i>What single factor should be the highest priority in making immigration policy decisions that impact those seeking to enter this country -- family or kinship ties to U.S. citizens, work skills, or education level of immigrants?</i>	
Family or kinship ties to U.S. citizens	25%
Work skills	42%
Education level	22%
All of the above <i>(Not read but coded.)</i>	4%
Another factor <i>(Not read but coded.)</i>	4%

Half of business leaders say Immigrants with low levels of education should have more opportunities to gain skills and knowledge in this country than they currently do, while 45% say they should not.

<i>In your opinion, should immigrants with low levels of education have more opportunities to gain skills and knowledge in this country than they currently do or not?</i>	
Yes	50%
No	45%
Don't know/Refused	5%

Business leaders were asked what talent, knowledge, or skills higher education institutions should develop in students to best prepare them for success in the workforce in the coming years. The most popular response for this open ended question was that institutions should provide internships and practical, on-the-job experience for students. In addition to experience, business leaders most want institutions to develop strong communication skills, including writing and speaking skills in graduates.

<i>In your opinion, what talent, knowledge, or skills should higher education institutions develop in students to best prepare graduates for success in the workforce in the coming years? (Open ended and coded.)</i>	
Work ethic/Discipline/Motivation	6%
Leadership Skills	1%
Problem solving/critical thinking/creative thinking/how to think	7%
People skills/positive attitude/respect/adaptability/teamwork/accountability	8%
Math and science	5%
Communication skills/English and writing skills	12%
Internships/on the job and practical experience	14%
Computer technology	7%
Basic life skills/real-world knowledge/common sense	9%
Business/economics/finance skills	<1%
Technical/Specific trade skills/Mechanical/Engineering/Medical	<1%
Other	9%
Don't know/Refused	22%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

Businesses have a big stake in how institutions are preparing graduates for the workforce, and as such have unique opportunities to contribute to opportunities for post-secondary degree and credential attainment. To understand generally the level of involvement that businesses currently have in this process, business leaders were asked what they are currently doing to help increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary degree, certificate or credential. The item was asked in an open-ended fashion.

Responses varied widely, but just 1 in 10 say they provide tuition reimbursement and scholarships and nearly 1 in 10 say they provide internships or mentoring and training and certification opportunities for employees.

<i>What is your business currently doing to help increase the proportion of Americans with a post-secondary degree, certificate, or credential? (Interviewer: Open ended and code)</i>	
Internships/Mentoring	4%
Recruit from schools and colleges/hire and provide jobs	5%
Provide classes/training/certifications for employees	5%
Provide tuition reimbursement/scholarships	8%
Support/encourage further education (non-specific)	3%
Donate to schools/colleges	2%
Hire staff that already have the qualifications	3%
Support or partner with school/colleges	4%
Offer flexible schedules to work and study	2%
Other	6%
Don't know/Refused	58%

\*Percentages may not add up to 100% due to inclusion of don't know/refused responses in calculations.

## SUMMARY

The majority of Americans recognize the importance of having a certificate or degree beyond high school but still feel that higher education is not affordable. Americans want to make sure that investing in an advanced degree or certificate will lead to a good job. Important factors in selecting a college or university include: faculty qualifications, financial assistance, degree quality, price and the percentage of students who are able to get a good job. More than half of Americans agree that a good job is essential to having a high quality of life. Two-thirds of the general population also concur that having a certificate, certification or degree beyond high school is essential for getting a good job.

Most business leaders realize the value of collaboration with higher education institutions. The importance of such collaboration cannot be understated since only a small percentage of business leaders feel that higher education institutions in this country are graduating students with the skills and competencies that their businesses need. Although one-third of leaders believe the majority of jobs require some kind of post-secondary degree or credential, business leaders still say they would consider someone without one. This may be because many higher education institutions aren't graduating candidates with the specific skills they need in their business.

Americans are yet circumspect about the quality of online education, though there seems to be a softening of this stance over the past three years Gallup has measured. Though a majority of business leaders favor a candidate with a traditional education over someone with an online education, importantly the amount of knowledge and skills a candidate has trump the candidate's college pedigree and major as key factors in making hiring decisions.

Business leaders favor green cards for foreign-born international students who complete a degree at a U.S. institution opportunities available for immigrants with low education levels. For business leaders, in contrast to the general population, work skills tops the list of factors that should drive immigration policy.

Americans and business leaders seem to be aligned on some issues surrounding higher education, Americans and business leaders both feel that only about 15% of employers were very likely to hire a candidate who has a degree from an online higher education provider over a candidate with a traditional degree. Over two-thirds of business leaders and Americans felt that the amount of knowledge and applied skills a candidate possesses are more important than the candidates major or where the candidate received their degree. Both business leaders and Americans felt that in the future it will be more important than it is now to have a post-secondary degree or credential to get a good job. More than half of business leaders and Americans would favor a policy issuing a green card to international students graduating from a U.S. institution.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper includes results from two surveys conducted by Gallup on behalf of Lumina Foundation.

The first study reported includes findings from a quantitative survey conducted to understand the perceptions of the general American population about several important issues pertaining to higher education, including degree attainment, quality and value, costs, and innovative learning models. To achieve these objectives, Gallup conducted 1,012 interviews from a random sample of individuals 18 years and older residing in landline-telephone households, cell-phone-only households, and cell-phone-user households.

Gallup conducted surveys in English only from Nov. 25 – Dec. 15, 2013. Up to three calls were made to each household to reach an eligible respondent.

The data set was statistically adjusted (weighted) using the following variables: race/ethnicity, gender, education, and age as defined by the most recent data from the Current Population Survey conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau. The final overall results are representative of the U.S. adult population 18 years and older.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with representatives from Lumina Foundation and Gallup. All interviewing was supervised and conducted by Gallup's interviewing staff. For results based on the total sample size of 1,012 adults, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error attributable to sampling and other random effects is  $\pm 4$  percentage points. For subgroups within this population (e.g., education level, gender, and income), the margin of error would be greater.



The second study reported includes findings from a quantitative survey conducted to understand the perceptions of business leaders about the quality and effectiveness of American higher education institutions in preparing graduates for the workforce. Gallup conducted interviews with business leaders in executive roles at their company. The sample was from Dun and Bradstreet. A simple stratified random sample design was used for sampling businesses. Businesses were grouped into 5 strata based on sales revenue (\$50,000-\$499,999/\$500,000-\$4.9Million/\$5M-\$14.9M/\$15M-\$49.9M/\$50M-\$100M+). Businesses with larger sales revenue were oversampled to ensure enough completes for analysis. Weights were calculated to take into account sampling rate and also the non-response rate by sales revenue and census region.

Gallup conducted surveys in English only from Nov. 25 - Dec. 16, 2013. Up to five calls were made to each business to reach an eligible respondent.

The questionnaire was developed in consultation with representatives from Lumina Foundation and Gallup. All interviewing was supervised and conducted by Gallup's full-time interviewing staff. For results based on the total sample size of 623 business leaders, one can say with 95% confidence that the margin of error attributable to sampling and other random effects is  $\pm 6$  percentage points.

In addition to sampling error, question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls. Reported frequencies may not add up to 100% in some cases due to rounding or the exclusion of "don't know" and refused results.

Smaller and larger business groups were created for the Lumina Foundation leader project based on annual revenue. For this study, businesses with less than 5 million dollars in annual revenue are classified as small businesses and businesses with more than 5 million dollars in annual revenue are classified as large businesses.

The following paper presents key findings of the surveys.